

Peeryodicals

By W. K. PEERY



To an old timer, modern advertising is a model of truth and merchandising integrity, compared to the lies and misrepresentations of advertisers in the gay nineties and early 1900s.

Country weeklies and the outside walls of cowbarns and farm outbuildings carried plethora of false advertising that would cause the head of a Hollywood publicity director to shake from shock.

Adulterated food, medicines and misleading advertising to promote sales were as common in the 1890s as knobby knees peeking from beneath miniskirts today.

To speak of the advertising misdeeds of that day, calls to mind the generally accepted immoralities of those times.

Farmers stove piped their potatoes. Of course you younger things of this generation never heard of this.

A farmer simply inserted a stove pipe inside a potato sack, packed around it fair sized tubers and then filled the stove pipe with small ones.

The pipe was withdrawn. The deception complete.

Merchants mismarked goods, selling shoddy pants for purest wool. About the only way you learned of the deception was when you got them wet.

What had been ankle length pants shrank to knee length. They became so tight around the seat the wearer dare not sneeze. It was really hazardous.

But for ways that were wayward and for means that were mean, the advertiser of drugs had no peer.

Let's begin with Lydia E. Pinkhams Vegetable Compound.

This remedy, in days before its virtues were questioned, the remedy was heaven's blessing to suffering women.

It was guaranteed to cure everything from feminine ills to a bad disposition and indifference to love making.

It purified the blood, relieved sleeplessness and gave the fair user a complexion to match a full-ripe peach, or your money back.

Tuberculosis and cancer were the hopeless diseases of that day.

There were remedies galore for both these ills, all guaranteed to cure, with the pictures of those giving testimony to having been cured right there in the ad to prove it. Yes, Sir!

Kidney, liver, bile disorders and recalcitrant bladders were the targets of the medical laboratories.

There were sufficient varieties of cures to keep the whole population of South Africa on a perpetual warring binge, inasmuch as most of these remedies had alcoholic content equivalent to 90 proof corn whiskey, the latter raw and unaged.

So common and so potent were some of these sovereign remedies that many grandpappies kept a bottle hidden in the oat bin for recuperative needs.

Other targets for the early dispensers of deceit were the venereal diseases.

These were open markets for any kind of nostrum. There was an advantage because any country bumpkin could not reveal the ineffectiveness of the cure because it would mean immediate condemnation by the community. A possible sermon from the local pulpit on the wages of sin could easily be included.

Nobody is telling this writer that the society we have around us today is a carnival of iniquity compared to what it was in my youth.

Compared to my day the present generation wears the bright shining armor of honesty in social procedures, business and politics.

This is not to say we were willfully out of moral step in the late 90's. We were simply naive, ignorant and pure sucker bait for the designing purveyor of misinformation.

Theodore Roosevelt and Dr. Wiley set in motion the laws to remove the curse of false advertising and misrepresentation in commerce. Most Pure Food Bills and all supporting measures had their origin at the beginning of this century.

All of this is not to deny the preponderance of wild advertising on TeeVee and radio today.

It may be disgusting to sensitive souls. The worst you can remark is its uninhibited silliness.

But pharmaceutical companies no longer put pure opium in baby tranquilizers or laudanum in cough syrups or injurious alkalines in liver pills.

Moreover they must state on the package just what it contains. This is not to say we understand what we read. But it is there just the same.

The old days were wonderful days, but who wants to live them over again?